

# HISTORICAL SKETCH

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OF THE

## PROGRESS

OF THE

ROGER WILLIAMS

# Monument Association,

WITH AN

## APPEAL TO THE PUBLIC

IN BEHALF THEREOF.



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More than seven years have now passed away, since the ROGER WILLIAMS MONUMENT ASSOCIATION was incorporated by the Legislature of Rhode Island, for the special purpose of erecting a durable monument to commemorate the name of Roger Williams, the founder of the State of Rhode Island upon the constitutional basis of both civil and religious liberty.

This beneficent achievement has been hailed throughout the world, as one of the most memorable events recorded in the annals of human government.

The descendants of Roger Williams, and the people of the State founded by him, unmindful of the services of their great benefactor, have neglected even to raise a common grave-stone to denote the spot where he was buried. His acts have brought honor and fame to the State of Rhode Island; while the people of this State have dishonored themselves by recklessly neglecting his ashes. Their character suffers by this negligence, not the name nor the fame of Roger Williams, which cannot be exalted by what

we may do. While the place of his mortal remains has been left forsaken, and almost forgotten, his name, character, and principles, have shone forth as a light to the world. "He has lived in death, spreading our name abroad in despite of our morbid life."

To remind the members of the Roger Williams Monument Association of their pledges, made seven years ago, by signing their names to a petition for an act of incorporation for the purpose declared and virtually promised therein, the following brief abstracts from the records of their proceedings are now presented.

It has hitherto been an apology for having done so little, that immediately after the organization of the Association, proceedings were arrested by the all-absorbing anxieties and exertions necessary for saving the civil liberty of the people of the United States from destruction by the war of the great Rebellion.

Happily that bitter struggle is over; and the time has now arrived for resuming, with grateful hearts, renewed efforts for redeeming the pledges made before the world by the following named subscribers to the petition for an act of incorporation, "*for the purpose of erecting a Monument in the City of Providence to the memory of Roger Williams, the founder of the State.*"

#### NAMES OF THE PETITIONERS.

Francis Wayland, Elisha Dyer, John Carter Brown, William Sprague, Stephen A. Douglas, John R. Bartlett, Thomas M. Clark, Christopher Rhodes, Thomas G. Turner, Samuel G. Arnold, William R. Staples, Elisha Harris, George A. Brayton, Seth Padelford, Stephen Randall, Zachariah Allen, Albert G. Greene, Amos D. Smith, William Gammell, Henry T. Beckwith, Roger W. Potter,

William G. Williams, Daniel S. Jones, Samuel L. Caldwell, George Baker, Frederic Denison, Barnas Sears, James Y. Smith, William M. Rodman, Jabez C. Knight, Thomas P. Ives, Arthur M. Potter, George D. Williams, Samuel Currey, Amos Perry, Joseph Banvard, Thomas G. Williams, Amasa Manton, Robert H. Ives, Charles Akerman, William Viall, Rowland G. Hazard, Wilkins Updike, Elisha R. Potter, Charles H. Denison, Edward Harris, Rufus Waterman, William S. Patten, Amos C. Barstow, Henry B. Anthony, Sullivan Dorr, James F. Simmons, Samuel Ames, Christopher S. Rhodes, Henry Lippitt, Joseph W. Sweet, Amasa S. Westcott, R. B. Cranston, James Atkinson, Peleg Clarke, Felix Peckham, Robert R. Carr, Thomas Dyre, Thomas C. Easton, Timothy Coggeshall, Charles H. Russell, Henry Jackson, Henry Y. Cranston, William H. Cranston, Benjamin B. Howland, Edward W. Lawton, N. W. Gould, Henry Bull, George Freeborn, John Clarke, David Sherman, William S. Coddington, Edward Wilbur, Benjamin Mumford, W. A. Clarke.

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### **Abstracts of the Proceedings of the Roger Williams Monument Association.**

On the 26th of April, 1860, a meeting of nearly two hundred persons of both sexes was held in Westminster Hall, in the City of Providence, assembled by the invitation of Mr. Stephen Randall, one of the lineal descendants of Roger Williams; who had previously made researches to discover and identify the place of sepulture of his distinguished ancestor. After Mr. Randall had succeeded in gathering up the remains from a nameless grave, and had temporarily preserved them for being duly honored by

some suitable memorial, the whole subject was submitted by him, for final disposition, to the numerous descendants of Roger Williams, and to the people of Rhode Island generally; they having all equally enjoyed the blessings of the civil and religious freedom mainly obtained by his bold exertions and patient sufferings.

The meeting was organized by the election of Hon. James Y. Smith as chairman, and Mr. Amos Perry as Secretary.

After eloquent addresses by several distinguished citizens, the following resolutions were unanimously adopted :

*“Whereas*, Mr. Stephen Randall, moved by filial regard for his distinguished ancestor, has, at no small expense of time and means, very carefully removed from their original, but neglected, resting place, to his own tomb, the remains of Roger Williams, and now has them awaiting a final resting place; and has also caused to be made an accurate map of the location of the original grave, in connection with the relative site of the house and of “the spring” of Roger Williams; and has now called the present meeting of the descendants of Roger Williams and others, interested in perpetuating the memory of his useful life:—It is therefore,

*“Resolved*, That we express to Mr. Randall our cordial approbation for his services, and especially for calling on us to advise and aid in erecting a monument, that may properly preserve the name and the remains of the illustrious Founder of the State of Rhode Island and of Religious Freedom.

*“Resolved*, That we invite all who feel an interest in this work to unite with us in carrying out a general plan for erecting a monument, that shall be a worthy memorial of Roger Williams, the apostle of “soul-liberty;” whose memory, like a priceless legacy, should be fondly cherished by all lovers of freedom throughout the world.”

To carry into effect these resolutions, a committee of

fifteen gentlemen was appointed to report a plan of proceedings to a subsequent meeting, adjourned to May 10th, 1860; when a petition for an act of incorporation was signed and presented, under the name of "The Roger Williams Monument Association." The proposed act of incorporation was speedily passed by the legislature, and duly accepted at a meeting holden on the fifth day of June, 1860.

The officers elected were :

*President*,—Francis Wayland.

*Vice-Presidents*,—Elisha Dyer, David King, Elisha R. Potter, William Sprague, Jabez C. Knight.

*Corresponding Secretary*,—John R. Bartlett.

*Recording Secretary*,—Amos Perry.

*Treasurer*,—James Y. Smith.

*Trustees*,—Zachariah Allen, John Carter Brown, Amos C. Barstow, Seth Padelford, George Baker, Alexander Duncan, Rowland G. Hazard, Amos D. Smith, Thomas G. Turner, Stephen Randall, Samuel L. Caldwell, William S. Slater, Thomas Durfee, William Gammell.

The records of the meeting state :

"At the request of the Chairman, (Hon. James Y. Smith,) the Governor of the State, and the Mayor of the City, conducted the President elect to the chair."

With this most respectable support, the Roger Williams Monument Association was auspiciously inaugurated.

By the terms of the Charter, the performance of the duties of the association is placed under the charge of a Board of Trustees; who necessarily appointed executive committees, for more prompt and immediate action in preparing estimates and reports.

The first business presented for the consideration of the

Board of Trustees, was the selection of a suitable site, and of the proper form of the proposed monument, together with the costs. For this purpose, a special committee was appointed, with instructions to report “on the *site, character and cost* of a suitable monument.”

This special committee (Zachariah Allen, James Y. Smith and Seth Padelford) reported to the Board of Trustees on the 9th of July, 1860, substantially as follows :

The committee stated in their report, that during a preliminary discussion of the topics referred to them, which took place at the time of their appointment, the expressions of the opinions of the several gentlemen constituting the Board of Trustees combined to indicate their preference for the general design of a shaft in the form of an Egyptian obelisk, or of a Grecian column. Consequently the attention of this committee was more particularly directed to the examination of conspicuous sites for monumental shafts. The plan of a simple statue of bronze or marble on a low pedestal, artistically sculptured, was not preferred, from the fact that no likeness either in sculpture or painting exists, to personify the form and features of Roger Williams ; and it would necessarily have involved the embodiment of an ideal fiction to represent truthful history, and the memory of a great event, as well as of a great and good man.

It appears that the committee selected the form of a Grecian column, in preference to that of a tapering and pointed obelisk, in order that space might be provided within the base for statuary and other sculptures, as well as historical inscriptions ; and that a colossal statue, if desirable, might be sublimely exalted on the summit, in bold outlines aloft in the sky.

The most conspicuous spot in the City of Providence



was found to be the summit of Prospect Hill ; and, most fortunately for the proposed object, the apex of this hill was the identical lot that constituted the homestead and the burial place selected by Roger Williams himself, on his arrival in this " wilderness."

As evidence of the conspicuousness of the summit of Prospect Hill, which is two hundred feet above tide water, the committee refer to the historical fact that during the revolutionary war, a beacon fire was kindled thereon at the top of a mast, which was seen by the inhabitants of Cambridge, Massachusetts, and of New London, Conn. This circumstance rendered the supposition reasonable, that the top of a monumental shaft, nearly two hundred feet high, might be visible from the top of the Bunker Hill Monument, (near Cambridge,) which is two hundred and twenty feet high. In this case, the worthy descendants of the Puritans might there behold the Roger Williams Monument rising as an emblem of the triumph of Religious Freedom, here first established on earth by the man banished into a wilderness by their forefathers ; while the people of Rhode Island, in return, might hence reciprocally regard the Bunker Hill Monument as a sister emblem of the triumph of Civil Liberty, erected on the spot where it originated.

It appears that the committee also recommended the form of a column in preference to that of a tapering obelisk, 'to avoid the appearance of the chimney of some manufactory, the summit of a column being crowned with a capital, like a diadem, on its head, to distinguish it unmistakably from all plebeian rivals.

Sheltered from the weather in the base of the column, figures representing some of the most interesting scenes in the life of Roger Williams, and also of William Harris,

John Clarke and other first-settlers of Providence, might hereafter be securely arranged and preserved.

“ A panel of the base of the column might be specially reserved for commemorating the hospitable friendship of Canonius and of Miantonomoh to Roger Williams, when banished in mid-winter from Boston; showing the contrast between the kindnesses of Christian savages, and the cruel persecutions of savage Christians.”

It thus appears that the committee selected a monumental column, not to the exclusion of choice works of art in marble and bronze, but rather for the subsidiary purpose of exhibiting and preserving them to the best advantage.

And for perpetuating the preservation of the column, with its contents, the committee suggested that an income might be derived from visitants; who would be attracted to ascend to this lofty pinnacle, to enjoy the prospect of looking down upon the city spread out humbly below;— upon the broad and beautiful landscape of the surrounding country; on the shores of the lovely Narragansett Bay, and on the blue ocean bounding the distant horizon. All these objects might be brought within the range of distinct vision, by a telescope mounted on the broad summit of the capital.

To confirm the supposition of an available income from visitants, it may now be added, that more than five thousand dollars were received in the year 1866, from visitants who ascended to the top of the Bunker Hill Monument. Although this incidental advantage is not a primary object, as in constructing an observatory, yet certainly it is a secondary object of great importance for perpetuating the preservation of the proposed monumental column.

These combined considerations appear to have prevailed

in producing the recommendation by the committee of the selection of a *site* on the top of Prospect Hill, for the proposed monument, and the *characteristic form of the shaft of a column*.

“In regard to the *material* for a monument,” they say, “it may be superfluous to state, that there is abundance of granite within a few miles of the city of Providence; and it should not be omitted here to suggest, that there are extensive quarries of stratified gneiss, of an excellent quality, accessible by the construction of two or three miles of railway track to connect with the Hartford Railroad. A sample of this building material may be seen in the walls of the house on Pawtuxet street, occupied as a Catholic convent. In appearance, this stone so closely resembles granite, that the regular courses of masonry might be mistaken by many for granite. The quarries of gneiss being of perfectly plane stratification, the blocks of square, flat stones are extracted like blocks of ice from an ice-house, requiring but little labor to fit them for laying. The construction of the Bunker Hill Monument was the immediate cause of the opening of the quarries of Quincy granite near Boston; which now constitutes an important export to distant States; and, should the construction of the proposed Monument to Roger Williams be productive of the like result of working the gneiss quarries of Scituate, this excellent building material would render the city of Providence the most beautiful, as well as substantial city of New England; beside supplying an inexhaustible quantity for profitable exportation from the State.”

It thus appeared that there was no lack of suitable building materials.

In regard to the cost of a shaft of granite one hundred and fifty feet high, made of rough ashler dressed at the joints, estimates were presented by practical masons, making the cost about sixty thousand dollars.

At the same meeting of the Board of Trustees, July 9,

1860, Rev. Samuel L. Caldwell reported the draft of an appeal to the people of Rhode Island; wherein he stated:—  
 “Whatever commemoration is attempted, it should have a loftiness, impressiveness, and solid greatness, not unworthy of the great event thereby to be commemorated to future ages.”

“This report, and the one read by Mr. Allen on the site, character, and cost of the proposed monument, are received and adopted by the Board of Trustees,” as certified by the Secretary.

In their appeal to the people, the Board of Managers state, that they “have proposed the erection of a shaft of suitable height, with such accompaniments of inscriptions, statues, and sculptured illustrations, as may seem fit and feasible, on some commanding eminence in the city of Providence:—if possible, on the ground where was once the homestead and burial place of Williams. They will proceed in the work with the expectation that it will cost not much less than seventy-five thousand dollars.”

The Board of Managers then caused to be published in July, 1860, advertisements for plans for a monument, no less than one hundred and fifty feet high, for the remuneration of two hundred and fifty dollars, *if approved*.

On the presentation of several plans, they were not approved; and all further action appears to have been suspended by the always insuperable difficulty of agreement in matters of taste: thus literally verifying the ancient Latin aphorism, “*de gustibus non disputandum est* :”—*tastes are not to be disputed about*. They end in nothing; and so did the labors of the Managers of the Roger Williams Monument Association, as the records show.

At the annual meetings in 1861 and 1862, no progress appears to have been made; and an adjournment to the year 1863 was proposed, “in consequence of the distracted state of

the times, and the absence from the State of many of the members."

Similar fruitless annual meetings and adjournments are recorded up to the year 1866.

In the mean time expenses had been incurred for plans and designs, amounting to several hundred dollars; which constituted an outstanding debt due from the Roger Williams Monument Association. In consequence of this debt, a vote was passed at a meeting holden June 4th, 1861,—“ That in the opinion of this meeting, it is indispensable to make provision for the immediate payment of all debts now due from this Association; and that to this end it is desirable to collect from as many persons as possible the fee of three dollars, required as a condition of membership.”

An insufficient sum to discharge the debts incurred being obtained under this vote, the Association remained without funds and insolvent, instead of raising any funds to erect the proposed monument; and this debt was allowed to remain unpaid to the Treasurer, James Y. Smith, until near the expiration of six years.

These discouraging facts, combined with numerous others of a similar character, cannot fail to produce an impressive conviction, that mankind are not prone to build monuments for others, however splendidly they may build them for themselves. So little attention was paid to mark the spots where were buried the two most distinguished men Rhode Island has ever produced,—Roger Williams and General Nathanael Greene, that the final resting place of the former has only recently been sought for and identified; and where the grave of General Greene is, none of his descendants know. One of the prevalent religious sects in this State, the Friends, until quite recently, have

been conscientiously scrupulous about setting up a grave stone to perpetuate the memory of a departed friend, deeming every such memorial of human affection and reverence to be a monument of human pride. The people of the United States have neglected to raise a monument over the sacred ashes of Washington, their hero, statesman, and deliverer; and have left this pious duty to be performed by lottery dealers in Baltimore, and by speculative men in Washington, with meagre funds from casual contributors.

On the contrary, a proneness to desecrating the monuments of the dead appears to be a predominate propensity. The very pyramids of Egypt have been ransacked by excavations, and their massiveness alone has hitherto saved them. The tomb of Caesar, in Rome, has been used for a circus, and the tombs of the Kings of France were rilled during the revolution, and all the bodies thrown into a ditch. The monument of Jefferson, in Virginia, has been nearly destroyed by visitants, who have carried away the mutilated fragments; and similar desecrations elsewhere abound. Civilized men have even invaded the Indian mounds and heaps of stones or cairns, raised by barbarous nations to honor their dead. Quite recently the tribe of Narragansett Indians, within the borders of our State, have made complaints of the robbery of the grave of their great chief, Ninigret, of valuable deposits, including ornaments of precious metals, buried therein with superstitious piety for the future welfare of the departed in the spirit land.

To counteract this neglect, it was a sagacious foresight of the proprietors of lots in the North Burial Ground, and of the Swan Point Corporation, in this city, to obtain an act of the legislature for the City Council to hold endow-

ments of funds as trustees for perpetuating the preservation of those cemeteries.

Despairing of any action by the Roger Williams Monument Association, one of his lineal descendants, Mr Stephen Randall, has persevered under all difficulties to carry out the original plan of the trustees for erecting a monumental structure, as near the spot designated by them, and as similar in design, as appears to be now practicable. Considering the Association to have failed in accomplishing this object, as a similar spasmodic effort of a committee of the town of Providence failed in 1790, Mr. Randall deposited one thousand dollars in a city Savings Bank, in trust, as the commencement of a fund to be hereafter accumulated by interest and by other contributions, which, in process of time, will surely accomplish the proposed object.

At a recent meeting of the Trustees of the Roger Williams Monument Association, this proposed plan was considered to be the only feasible mode of proceeding with hope of success. The members present at this meeting, and at a subsequent adjourned meeting, adopted the following resolution, and promptly subscribed funds to pay off the old outstanding debt of the Association; so that an onward impulse might be finally given to the project, without that embarrassing contingent debt.

(Extract from the Records of the Association, April, 16, 1867.)

“ At the Annual Meeting held this day, Mr. Joseph Rogers presented the following Preamble and Resolutions; which were adopted:

“ *Whereas*, a descendant of Roger Williams, in a spirit of patriotic liberality, has deposited the sum of one thousand dollars in the People's Savings Bank, in Providence, in trust, to form a fund for the erection of a monument to Roger Williams; and

“ *Whereas*, it is desirable that such monument shall be erected at an early day: now, therefore, to promote that end, and to give to the citizens of Rhode Island an opportunity to manifest by their acts their veneration for the memory of the distinguished founder of our State:

“ *It is Resolved*, That the Board of Managers, with such others as they may appoint, be, and they are hereby appointed a committee to solicit and collect subscriptions toward the erection of such monument, each subscriber being bound during life to pay annually, in the month of October, the sum subscribed by him or her, with the reserved right of discontinuing said subscriptions by giving written notice of such intention before the first day of August, in any year, to the Treasurer of the Corporation; but to be bound to pay the subscription for that year, if such notice is not given until after that date; the said subscriptions, excepting the moderate amount for needful expenses, shall from time to time, (not less than once in each year), be deposited in the name of the Association in some safe Saving's Institution, or let on mortgage security, or invested in government securities, as the Trustees may decide, until the same, with the accumulations thereof by other deposits, gifts and bequests for that purpose, shall amount to a sum sufficient to procure a suitable lot and to erect the said monument, on Prospect Hill, in the city of Providence, between Angell and Halsey streets, and within three hundred feet of Prospect street; the outside wall to be of granite, and not less than one hundred and seventy feet high, besides an ornamental top of any suitable material.”

At a meeting of the Board of Managers, held on Monday, July 22d, 1867, it was

*Resolved*, That in conformity with the duty assigned to the Board by the preceding vote of the Corporation, they respectfully solicit subscriptions towards the erection of the monument; and the debts of the Association having been paid by recent subscriptions, they earnestly appeal to those members, who may not have contributed to the



discharge thereof, to now come forward and contribute their just proportion of the debt.

A number of subscriptions have been received, and several sums pledged. The amount already received has been deposited on interest.

The Board of Managers deem it just to the Mechanic's Association, of this city, to say, that the subject of the erection of a monument to Roger Williams was a matter of deep interest to them as early as the year 1850. A course of ten lectures was given to the public by as many distinguished gentlemen, gratuitously, at the solicitation of the Association; and a large committee from their number were also appointed to solicit subscriptions for this purpose in the several wards. The sum received from this effort was deposited in the Providence Institution of Savings, in 1851, and now, together with the interest accumulated thereon, amounts to \$250; which, in accordance with a vote passed by the Association, will be available whenever such progress has been made in the erection of a monument, as in the judgment of the Trustees of the Association will secure its completion.

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PROVIDENCE, July 25th, 1867.

*To the Board of Managers of*

*The Roger Williams Monument Association:*

GENTLEMEN:—I have the pleasure to report that the demands against the Association have been paid from recent subscriptions. Subscriptions are not required to be paid until October. The amount paid in advance (excepting the small sum applied to the payment of debts) has been deposited in Savings Bank.

Very truly,

JAMES Y. SMITH,

*Treasurer*

# OFFICERS OF THE ASSOCIATION,

Elected for the year 1867.

PRESIDENT :

SETH PADELFORD.

VICE-PRESIDENTS :

DAVID KING,

ELISHA R. POTTER,

THOMAS G. TURNER.

His Excellency AMBROSE E. BURNSIDE

His Honor THOMAS A. DOYLE.

CORRESPONDING SECRETARY :

JOHN R. BARTLETT.

RECORDING SECRETARY :

FREDERICK MILLER.

TREASURER :

JAMES V. SMITH.

TRUSTEES :

ZACHARIAH ALLEN,

AMOS C. BARSTOW,

GEORGE BAKER,

ROWLAND G. HAZARD,

SAMUEL A. PARKER,

SAMUEL L. CALDWELL,

JOSEPH ROGERS,

WM. C. WILLIAMS,

JOHN CARTER BROWN,

ALEXIS CASWELL,

ALEXANDER DUNCAN,

AMOS D. SMITH,

STEPHEN RANDALL,

WM. S. SLATER,

HENRY T. BECKWITH,

FREDERICK DENISON,

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